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ABSTRACT

Much debate is concerned with providing quality reading instruction to students who experience difficulty. This bulletin explores the various approaches advocated for teaching reading instruction to at-risk students, discusses the research underpinnings of these approaches, and examines the practical implications of the models. Two approaches toward reading instruction for at-risk students are quite divergent. The first approach tends to stress systematic instruction in phonics and word-attack strategies. The second approach, the "whole language" approach, emphasizes unity between reading and all other forms of communication. The whole-language approach is the subject of chapter 1, and the direct-instruction tradition is discussed in chapter 2. Then chapter 3 is devoted to a survey of emerging trends in commprehension instruction, including story grammar, framing, and reciprocal teaching. Finally, the conclusion presents a synthesis of the contributions of the whole-language and direct-instruction traditions. (59 references) (SI)

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READING INSTRUCTION FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

Implications of Current Research

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Russell Gersten and Joseph Dimino

Oregon School Study Council
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Russell Gersten and Joseph Dimino

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Preface

Phonics advocates and whole-language proponents have a common foe: illiteracy. But too often, it seems, they have been content to fight each other rather than to wage all-out war against reading achievement scores that, especially for low-socioeconomic-status students, remain appallingly low.

For those of us who would like to see a united assault on illiteracy, it is heartening to read this irenic and balanced essay by Russell Gersten and Joseph Dimino. They assess the direct-instruction and whole-language approaches—identifying the strong and weak points of each—in an attempt to underscore what research has shown about teaching at-risk students to read.

Gersten is associate professor in the College of Education, University of Oregon. He has conducted extensive research in reading comprehension, inservice teacher training, and all aspects of the education of at-risk students. He has directed eleven research grants for the U.S. Department of Education.

Dimino is a program specialist for the Long Beach Unified School District. He has conducted research on comprehension strategies for at-risk students, and his articles have appeared in *Educational Leadership* and *The Elementary School Journal.*

Philip K. Piele
Executive Secretary

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Introduction

In what some consider his greatest poem, William Butler Yeats confronted the issue of creativity, probing the factors that lead to the creation of great poetry. He did this in the form of a dialogue between two men, much like a turn-of-the-century Siskel and Ebert.

One claimed that "style is found by sedentary toil/ And by imitation of great masters." He was, of course, alluding to the fact that even the most idiosyncratic artists—Cezanne, Joyce, Yeats himself—typically begin their careers with fairly traditional work, often in the style of masters of the past. His counterpart indicated it took a good deal more than imitation and study to develop a personal style.

In the most heated part of the debate, one man asserts that, to write great poetry, one must first discover one's true self. He is violently attacked by his friend, who says, "That is our modern hope, and by its light/ we have lit upon the gentle, sensitive mind/ And lost the old nonchalance of the hand....We...half create/ timid, entangled, empty." The two friends share their divergent insights into the careers of Keats and Dante. They ponder how they developed their insights and visions of reality. The debate continues, unresolved, as night turns into morning.

The debate about how to effectively teach reading to at-risk students has continued, unresolved, for almost a century (Carbo 1988). There is every reason to believe it will continue throughout our lifetimes. In the midst of a recent debate, Pearson (cited in Rothman 1989) declared that "reading is more a religion than a science." The purpose of this Bulletin is to explore the various approaches advocated for teaching reading instruction to at-risk students, discuss the research underpinnings of these approaches, and examine the practical implications of the models. In no way do we attempt to resolve this debate. Yet we do hope to shed some insights into the extraordinarily complex issue of how to provide quality reading instruction to students who experience difficulty.

The two major orientations toward reading instruction for at-risk

students are quite divergent. The first approach tends to stress systematic instruction in phonics and word-attack strategies. The belief is that if students cannot read fluently and accurately, they certainly will be unable to comprehend. Usually, the approach calls for an early emphasis on oral reading, with a gradual transition to increased amounts of silent reading. The major defenders of this approach have been Chall (1967 and 1989), Flesch (1981), and, most recently, cognitive psychologists such as Adams (1989). They all react to the lack of systematic word-attack instruction in most conventional basals.

The second approach has been called "whole language," or literature-based. It emphasizes the unity between reading and all other forms of communication—writing, speaking, listening. Whole-language proponents decry the emphasis on skill sheets and instruction in discrete comprehension or word-attack skills. They feel that reading instruction should be more spontaneous, more authentic, more integrated, more fun. They believe that the primary goal is for teachers to encapsulate and model the excitement of reading.

The whole-language approach is the subject of chapter 1, and the direct-instruction tradition is discussed in chapter 2. Then chapter 3 is devoted to a survey of emerging trends in comprehension instruction, including story grammar, framing, and reciprocal teaching. Finally, the conclusion presents a synthesis of the contributions of the whole-language and direct-instruction traditions.

Chapter 1

Whole Language/ Literature-Based Approaches

When Pearson alluded to reading being more of a religion than a science, he certainly had the advocates of whole-language approaches in mind. In the past few years, an ever increasing number of reading specialists (Harste 1985, Goodman 1986, Routman 1988)—and some state departments of education (California State Department of Education 1988)—have decided that whole-language approaches to teaching reading are the answer to the problems of at-risk students.

Whole language views the development of literacy to be interrelated with all other facets of language development—speaking, listening, expressive writing. They feel that students can acquire literacy in much the same way as they acquire oral language—naturally (Altwerger and others 1987, Goodman 1986). Whole language is an outgrowth and refinement of the "language experience" approaches of the sixties and early seventies, although there are important differences. Whereas language experience stressed experience charts created by children dictating to teachers, whole language stresses the reading of quality children's books. Books with predictable patterns are deemed especially useful for young students. For all ages, real books—not edited versions—are recommended as texts to be used.

Whole language stresses children's writing, often using invented spelling (Harste 1985). Whole language attempts to improve students' "ability to think with words, and... stimulate language development in all media of expression and reception, with the ultimate goal as reading the writings of others" (Stahl and Miller 1989).

Generally the whole-language advocates do an excellent job of critiquing some of the worst features of conventional basal reading instruction for students deemed at risk. They cite the increasing number of studies demon-

strating that, year after year, students placed in "low" reading groups receive too much instruction in isolated skills and sight words, as well as dubious skills such as homonyms and alphabetization, at the expense of comprehensive instruction (Allington 1983, Garcia and others 1988, Collins 1982, Moll and others 1980). Their diet consists primarily of ditto sheets, flash cards, and drills on sounds in isolation, occasionally punctuated with round-robin reading. Students placed in high-ability groups, on the other hand, have many more opportunities to work on comprehension (Collins 1982). Allington, in particular, noted that low-achieving students rarely have the experience of sustained reading, let alone the opportunity to discuss, analyze, and write about what they read.

Whole-literature advocates realize students do need to spend some time on phonic word analysis skills in the early grades. They believe, however, that this instruction should *always* be integrated with the literature being read, never taught in isolation. The following excerpt from a whole-language manual (Cullinan 1987) gives readers a sense of this approach:

> The teacher reads the story aloud and points to the words. Next, the group reads the story through several times in unison, *although some students may join in only on repetitive refrains*....As children repeatedly hear the words and see the print, they make associations between letters and sounds; *many children figure out the code by themselves.* Teachers ask students to point to words that begin alike or ones that have similar parts; phonics is taught in context, not in islolation." [emphasis added]

Research has consistently shown, however, that few at-risk students will "figure out the code by themselves."

Joy and Authenticity

A major goal of whole-language instruction is to bring a sense of wonder and joy back into reading instruction for at-risk students (Routman 1988, California framework). These assertions are, in fact, a genuine reaction to the nature of much conventional reading instruction, especially for students with problems. Boyer's (1983) study concluded that "classes are at times inspired, occasionally dreadful and most often routine." Goodlad (1984) and associates found "emotionally flat" classrooms, with little exuberance, joy, laughter, abrasiveness, praise, or corrective support of individual student performance, particularly in classes containing at-risk students. Duffy's (1983) observations of reading instruction noted that many teachers are almost obsessed with establishing and maintaining routines for "getting through" all the skill sheets and round-robin reading activity. Discussion of

comprehension questions was almost always done in a rush. Few teachers spent any time explaining concepts, probing students, providing feedback, or clarifying. Teachers virtually never stopped to see what kids thought about the story, or even to see if kids understood the story. If a student answered a question incorrectly, the teacher moved right on to another student in the search for the right answer.

In discussing this issue, the whole-language literature often takes on an almost mystical tone—typically peppered with testimonials about how teaching regained its meaning for an individual after she or he discovered whole language. Accounts indicate that whole-language instruction is a process, not a particular method, and a teacher must authentically share experiences with students (Garcia and Pearson 1989), give up control, and celebrate risk taking (Routman 1988). The hope is that students will also emulate the risk taking, the probing, the aura of experimentation that the teacher models for them, and begin to understand what authentic learning is; that very often questions have many correct answers; and that all literature, great and small, deals with complex human issues rarely translatable to fill-in-the-blank worksheets.

Basals and Real Literature

The past decade has not been kind to basal readers. Researchers have documented the reliance, if not overreliance, of many teachers on the basal teachers' guides, and the fragmented quality of so much of the instruction presented in these series. The earliest basal readers consisted of stories and questions at the end of each selection. Beginning in the 1940s, the writers began to realize that something else must be provided. They created a series of workbooks consisting of comprehension activities to accompany each reader in the series. They developed these activities out of the notion that comprehension consists of a series of skills—for example, sequencing, locating information, identifying the main idea. These exercises rarely were related to the day's reading passage. In the next forty years, the number of skills and number and type of workbook exercises continually expanded. Activities involving dictionary use, alphabetization, homonyms, and synonyms were included.

The conception of comprehension as a series of discrete, measurable skills began to be questioned in the 1970s. The major impetus came from cognitive psychology, with the evolution of schema theory (Anderson and others 1979) and constructivist models of reading. According to these views, reading is not a series of orchestrated skills, but an interaction between the reader and the text. We construct meaning as we read. This view has led to

a loss of faith and interest in the explicit teaching of skills and a burgeoning interest in the much more exciting notion of teaching strategies. Researchers have tried to isolate the strategies used by excellent readers and to teach these strategies to all. To date, there has been some promising research on this topic, although the findings have often been modest (Pressley and others 1989). Many of the studies have been small scale (for example, Idol 1987).

The basal reader publishers have attempted to adapt to this changing conception to some extent, but many changes have been merely cosmetic. What the publishers previously called a *skill* is now labeled a *strategy* (Center for Study of Reading 1988, Alexander and Judy 1988).

Often the basal readers adapt, abridge, or simplify short stories or material from magazines. This practice has been widely attacked. In attempting to improve the readability, the publishers often substituted simple words for complex words, and simple sentences for complex and compound sentences. Yet as Bruce (1984) pointed out, this often makes the material more difficult to understand. By eliminating the "howevers" and "becauses," the reader can no longer fathom why characters do certain things. In addition, the plethora of simple sentences and colorless words destroys the author's style. And the abridged versions often lack sections that describe motivation or build empathy. The end result is often boring.

An example from Routman (1988) exemplifies the problem. She presents two pages from a story—first the original version:

> Along time ago there was an old man.
> His name was Peter, and he lived in an old, old house.
> The bed creaked.
> The floor squeaked.
> Outside, the wind blew the leaves through the trees.
> The leaves fell on the roof. Swish. Swish.
> The tea kettle whistled. Hiss. Hiss.
> "Too noisy," said Peter.

Here is the adapted version that appears in a current basal reader (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1986, *A Place For Me):*

> Peter was an old man
> Who lived in an old, old house.
> There was too much noise in Peter's house.
> The bed made noise.
> The door made noise.
> And the window made noise.
> Peter didn't like all that noise.

Routman concluded:

> Beginning readers love reading the original version and read it easily and eagerly. The six lines beginning with "The bed creaked...The

> floor squeaked..." appear nine times in this short, delightful story. The magic of the language, the rhyme and rhythm, the repetition of the above passage and others throughout the book, and the noisy words themselves ("Swish. Swish." and "Hiss. Hiss.") make it fun to read and actually easier than the basal version.
>
> The original version deals with non-concrete imagery of the sounds of the wind blowing leaves through the trees, leaves falling on the roof, and a whistling tea kettle—rich language which leads children to form mental images of the sounds. By contrast, the story language in the basal reflects only concrete objects and then only to make "noise." The poetic language is gone....The child has been deprived of exposure to literary language, so necessary for the development of imaginative writing and a love of literature.

Whole-language advocates have argued for bringing real books into classrooms to replace the dreary adapted text in the basals. Books should be around the classroom for the students to browse through or read throughout the day. If a book is too hard for kids, the teacher can read it to them; in fact, teachers' reading to students is an essential aspect of whole language, and observations of whole-language classes reveal that a good deal of time is spent with teachers reading to students.

Students who have difficulty in reading need interesting, well-written reading materials to motivate them, rather than reading material with controlled vocabulary, but no style. According to whole-language advocates, the major failure in conventional reading instruction is that students don't know why they are doing these exercises, and are both bored and frustrated with the material they read. According to whole-language proponents like Routman (1988) and Harste (1985), once students understand the purpose of reading and are motivated to learn to read, they will progress rapidly.

Routman (1988) illustrates this point with a personal experience as a remedial reading teacher. She had just finished reading the students a beautifully illustrated children's book, which they loved. They wanted to read it; she refused to let them because it was too hard for them. They insisted, she gave in, and, with adequate practice, they were able to read (or at least memorize) the entire book. She cites how differently the kids responded to reading this book, with its rhymes and large, pretty pictures—as compared to their consistently desultory response to standard remedial reading fare. For the first time, they became interested in reading.

As former remedial reading teachers, we also have experienced such occasions. I (Russell Gersten) remember a virtually nonreading eleven-year-old, Ernest, who slowly, painfully went through the childish, arid stories consisting of only phonetically regular words in the carefully controlled Palo Alto and Merrill series. I brought in a series of British science books—that

used a simplified vocabulary. Ernest's motivation and the quality of his reading dramatically increased. I supplemented this with writing activities (in the then fashionable language experience mode). I also read to him daily from a Jack London novel. He was entranced.

Research on Whole Language and At-Risk Students

A recent comprehensive review of all extant research on whole language (Stahl and Miller 1989) found that, overall, whole-language approaches were no more effective than conventional basal reading approaches. This was true on both standardized measures of reading achievement, as well as more naturalistic measures (oral reading miscue analyses and attitude measures). The researchers found that, although whole-language approaches are commonly advocated for lower-SES populations and groups of at-risk students, they are rarely effective for these groups.

Stahl and Miller did find that whole language seemed to have a positive effect in the area of kindergarten reading/reading readiness activities, where it often produced significantly better performance than conventional basal activities. The effects were reversed, however, in first grade.

The authors present some plausible explanations for these findings. They conclude that the emphasis on listening to stories and writing stories may serve a useful function for at-risk students in kindergarten, in that they get to really see the many purposes of reading, and get a sense of the pleasures that can be associated with reading and writing. The overemphasis on drills and skills and very simple stories that typify many basal series will not accomplish this.

On the other hand, the reversal in first grade may be largely due to the limitations of whole language as a total reading program. Whereas whole language may do a good job in increasing students' motivation to read, it does not provide systematic instruction in how to read. As Chall (1989) recently commented, "phonics as needed" is not a logical approach to teaching reading to at-risk students. It violates all we know about effective instruction. Granted, there are some students who can learn in this indirect, incidental fashion, especially those middle- and upper-SES students who come to school with some skill in reading. Delpit (1988, cited in Stahl and Miller 1989) thinks that whole-language approaches may simply give these students an opportunity to demonstrate what they have already learned at home.

But the majority of low-SES students need review, practice, clarity, systematic feedback—that is, compassionate instruction in how to "break the code." Chall (1989) concluded,

> To say that teachers should teach phonics only as needed is to put a greater burden of responsibility on teachers and children than theory, research, and practice support. And it puts at *even greater risk those children who need the instruction most—low-income, minority, and learning-disabled children.* [emphasis added]

Chall's conclusions parallel observations made by Stahl and Miller (1989), Delpit (1988), and Garcia and Pearson (1989)—that whole language does not make sense as a *comprehensive* approach for teaching reading to at-risk students. While reflecting on the Stahl-Miller analysis, the senior author returned to his experience with eleven-year-old Ernest. Despite the increase in motivation when Ernest read (and wrote about) real books and the initial increase in reading performance, Ernest never really learned to read.

There are numerous positive features to the whole-language movement. The first is its emphasis on listening comprehension and its relationship to reading comprehension. The second is the emphasis on writing and deemphasis on work sheets.

Perhaps most important is its emphasis on the use of quality children's literature to replace the abridged, adapted material so prevalent in the basal series. Analysis of literature can be more productive than the isolated skill practice and exercises that have characterized basal series. Clearly, comprehension activities should be directly linked to stories and novels students are currently reading. What is less clear is how to seriously and systematically help students comprehend and analyze what they read.

Chapter 2

The Direct Instruction Tradition

Direct instruction, like whole language, developed as a reaction to perceived weaknesses in conventional basal reading approaches. However, the developers of the model (Becker 1977, Engelmann 1975) and those who came to advocate most aspects of the model based on their independent research on effective reading instruction (Anderson and others 1979, Rosenshine and Stevens 1984, Idol 1988, Stallings 1980) had a very different analysis of what was wrong with reading instruction and how to fix it. Essentially, their view was that reading instruction for at-risk students needs to be more precise, clearer, and more systematic.

They saw conventional instruction as geared to the average student, so those with problems don't get enough practice before moving on to a new topic. To direct-instruction advocates, a wide range of specific, concrete examples are necessary. As Idol (1988) comments: "If concepts are presented briefly and are not followed by sufficient practice opportunity, the poor reader is likely to flounder." Durkin (1984) documented that teachers' guides for basal series provide few examples and very vague directions for how to teach.

It is important to note that there are many, many different definitions of *direct instruction.* To some, direct instruction means any time the teacher talks to students (as opposed to supervising seatwork). This can involve lectures to students or reviews of homework assignments. This all-encompassing view seemed to be corroborated by a recent ASCD survey of middle schools in which 97 percent reported that they used direct instruction. The core definition of direct instruction, however, is quite a bit more specific.

The First Decade: Project Follow Through

In order to understand the term *direct instruction* and the evolution of the concept, it is necessary to go back to its roots. Direct instruction was originally conceived as a means to accelerate learning for economically disadvantaged and other at-risk populations. The concept, the instructional methodology, and the principles of curriculum design all evolved out of the experiences of Project Follow Through.

Follow Through was implemented in some of the poorest, most disorganized communities in the U.S. Students often entered the program in kindergarten with limited exposure to reading and language concepts. These were the type of children likely to fail in school. In fact, the evaluation of Follow Through conducted for the U.S. Office of Education indicated that, without an exceptional intervention, many of these students did do quite poorly, ending third-grade reading at about the 28th percentile (Stebbins and others 1977).

Direct instruction concerned itself with what many perceive as mundane decisions—the best wording for teachers to use in demonstrating a concept, the number of examples necessary for low-performing students to truly master a concept, exactly how errors are corrected, how many times each morning the lowest-achieving students get to read.

One image permeates all thinking about direct instruction. It is an image of students' experiencing unremitting success in all areas of academic work. The idea was to create a learning environment so that students who typically would fail almost always succeeded. This could not be done with conventional textbooks, so new curricula were developed. Teacher training stressed high levels of teacher-student interaction. It emphasized the role of the teacher not only as a conveyor of information, but as a provider of feedback and guidance to students.

The major operating principle behind the early work on direct instruction in Follow Through was that, if students experienced unremitting success in all their academic work, very different things would happen to these disadvantaged students. According to the philosophy, if students experienced success each day at a high rate (85-95 percent), and received clear feedback the few times they made errors, their self-confidence, attitudes toward reading, and reading ability would increase. And then learning to read would be viewed in a positive light.

It was this image of unrelenting success that drove most of the research, theory, curriculum development, and teacher training procedures associated with direct instruction. A set of principles was developed to accomplish this goal. These principles were field tested, revised, and evaluated in twenty low-income communities between 1969 and 1977 and found

to be effective in raising reading performance of thousands of low-income students (Stebbins and others 1977, Becker 1977) to levels close to their middle-class peers, that is, 40th percentile.

Direct Instruction Since Follow Through: Legacy of the 'Effective Teaching' Research

The effectiveness of the essentials of the direct-instruction approach was corroborated by a host of independent researchers (Anderson and others 1979, Idol 1987, Gersten and others 1982, Stallings 1975 and 1980). Their studies of both pullout remedial reading instruction and conventional reading instruction in the classroom helped develop a richer picture of the instructional variables that enhance reading achievement for at-risk students. Researchers have synthesized the findings across a whole range of studies examining effective reading instruction for at-risk students. Stein, Leinhardt, and Bickel (1989) noted the findings are remarkably uniform across settings (mainstreamed classroom, special pullout program) and across grade levels. These features have been summarized so extensively in the past that only a brief summary follows.

A key insight of the research is that teachers who work effectively with at-risk students spend a good deal of time actively teaching groups of students, rather than supervising seatwork or engaging in lengthy one-on-one tutorial sessions. Effective teachers are explicit about the goals of the lesson and spend adequate time explaining a concept or supervising while a group practices a new skill before the students are asked to perform independently. Clarity is essential. There is growing evidence that explicit step-by-step instruction is optimal for at-risk students. Teachers need to not only explain the concept or strategy, but actually show students how to apply the new strategy over a range of examples (Pearson and Dole 1987, Gersten and Carnine 1986).

Christenson, Ysseldyke, and Thurlow (1989) stress the importance of feedback. They note that in typical classrooms teachers interact differently with low-achieving students than with their peers. To be successful with at-risk students, teachers must ensure that the students are provided with many opportunities to respond during each lesson and are given a good deal of feedback.

Effective teachers are always concerned with mastery throughout the lesson. As Stein and others (1989) note, "*Mastery does not materialize from brief encounters*, but rather develops with academically engaged time spent on material that is at an appropriate level of difficulty and that is subsequently tested."

The key underpinning of this approach is that at-risk students learn to read when they receive instruction that is clear, when they are given many opportunities to participate, and when they are provided with clear feedback on the accuracy of their responses. It is important to note that most advocates of direct instruction do not necessarily only stress phonics during the initial stages of reading instruction. Systematic instruction in comprehension is advocated as an essential part of direct instruction (Idol 1988, Carnine and Kinder 1985).

Nagging Concerns about Direct Instruction

As the 1980s drew to a close, many were expressing concerns abou these findings. Some feel that with direct instruction the teacher is always control, always ensuring all kids get adequate feedback, constantly assessing how well kids are doing. To many, this does not seem democratic enough or natural enough. Many wonder how kids will ever learn to function independently (for example, Peterson 1979).

Further, Cazden (1983, cited in Gage 1989) shared the sentiments of many when, in 1983, she concluded that direct instruction "can only be implemented in an authoritarian, manipulative, bureaucratic system." The resentment toward any type of top-down technocratic teacher training is strong (for example, Rosenholtz 1989).

What, then, is the legacy of this research and what is its relevance for contemporary conceptions of reading instruction? The process-product or "effective teaching" research made at least one major contribution. The major researchers all looked at the interactions that occur during classroom reading instruction using low- and moderate-inference observational systems. Unlike previous researchers, they did so without regard for the label or brand name a particular teacher or school puts on its reading program, without inquiring as to the teacher's philosophy. The researchers did this intentionally. Their focus was totally on the student, not on the labels the teachers put on events. Their function was to accurately record what really happens to at-risk students during reading instruction and which patterns of teaching enhance reading achievement.

In several experimental studies, teachers were successfully trained to implement these findings to improve the quality of the reading instruction. Stallings (1980) used a highly scientific yet personalized approach to improve the instruction provided by high school remedial reading teachers. She and her staff shared their observational data with the teachers, and made specific suggestions based on these data. Resultant improvements in student learning were noted.

In Follow Through, a special curriculum was used that embodied many of the principles discussed above, especially the clarity of presentation, step-by-step explanations, adequacy of practice, and frequent opportunities for students to respond. In addition, consultants visited classrooms every few weeks to provide feedback to teachers on the use of direct-instruction teaching procedures. Several years ago, an independent evaluator interviewed twenty-one teachers implementing this approach. Although some teachers resented the high level of specificity in the teachers' guides, most saw how it dramatically improved their effectiveness with low-achieving students (Gersten and others 1986).

The lower-key approach utilized by Anderson and others (1979) also led to significant improvement in student reading performance. In summary, teachers can be trained or coached to implement many of these procedures, and typically there is significant growth in student reading performance.

Another concern is that direct instruction is an effective means of teaching word-attack skills and other skills involving rote learning, but an ineffective method for teaching comprehension. The independent evaluation of Follow Through (Stebbins and others 1977) made it clear that this was not true. They found direct instruction to be a highly effective method for improving comprehension of low-income students in the primary grades. Students' performance on standardized comprehension tests was at or close to the national norm level.

Still, there is serious concern about the efficacy of direct instruction as a means to help students read independently and analyze what they have read without teacher guidance. Duffy and others (1987) and Rosenshine (1989) called for an expanded view of direct instruction, one that addresses "how to teach a skill when you don't know all the steps." More emphasis is placed on the teacher as facilitator.

As direct-instruction researchers approached the area of reading comprehension, the model has evolved. Newer conceptions attempt to incorporate innovations from cognitive psychology with what we know about effective instruction. Many of these efforts are still in their infancy, having been field-tested with small groups of students. Results have been consistently promising. The next section introduces some of these approaches.

Chapter 3

Emerging Trends in Comprehension Instruction

Most of the new research on teaching at-risk students falls into the category of scaffolded instruction. *Scaffolding*, based on the work of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky, is an instructional process that enables students to solve a problem or achieve a goal they could not accomplish on their own. The teacher concentrates on developing skills that are emerging in the students' repertoire but that are as yet immature (Palincsar 1986). In scaffolded instruction, the teacher often "thinks aloud," explaining to students in a step-by-step fashion how he or she reached a specific conclusion.

Scaffolded instruction creates a shared language between students and teachers, so that teachers can provide useful, readily understood feedback to students when they need prompts to overcome difficulties (Gersten and Carnine 1986). There is a great deal of dialogue between teacher and students. As soon as possible, the students take over, and the role of the teacher shifts to that of a coach, pushing students to express their thoughts on increasingly complex issues. Gradually the temporary structure, or "scaffold," is removed, and students perform independently.

In order for teachers to "think aloud" and break down the process of making complex inferences into small steps, some consistent framework or structure must be used.

Approximately sixty studies comparing some type of scaffolded or explicit instruction in reading comprehension with more traditional methods have been conducted. Much of this research has been stimulated by cognitive psychology. Findings have been extremely positive, especially for at-risk students (Pressley and others 1989). Two examples of scaffolded instruction follow.

Story Grammar

The analysis of folk tales conducted by anthropologists and of short stories by psychologists early in the century led to a set of rules that described the structure of stories. They discovered that, regardless of age or culture, when humans tell or retell stories, they follow a set pattern. This pattern is referred to as *story grammar*. Story grammar involves the articulation of the protagonist's problem or conflict, a description of the attempts to solve the problem, and an analysis of the events that led to the resolution. Also included is the analysis of characters' reactions to the events in the story and the formulation of the story's theme or themes.

To exemplify how story grammar can be used to help at-risk students comprehend narrative material, we will discuss one study utilizing explicit, interactive, comprehension-strategy instruction (Dimino and others in press).

In this study, story-grammar instruction consisted of a modeling and a teacher-assisted phase. During the modeling phase, the teacher explained the story-grammar elements and demonstrated how they are found in short stories and how to record them on a story-grammar notesheet. The students and teacher took turns reading to a designated point in the story. Then, "thinking aloud," the teacher said, "I see a problem" or "It looks like we have a problem." The teacher stated the problem and wrote it on the notesheet that was projected in front of the students.

During a later lesson, the grammar elements were determined, and the teacher then explained how these elements are used to generate a theme. Students were taught to generate a theme statement by using the story-grammar notesheet to review all the elements. The teacher indicated that there may be more than one appropriate interpretation of the theme but that all themes must be justified by the story-grammar elements.

Determining themes was especially difficult for the students. They generated themes that were too specific or simplistic. Three techniques were used to assist the students in developing broader theme statements. First, the teacher reviewed themes from prior stories to illustrate how the events in a story are used to develop a *general* statement indicating what the author is trying to say. Second, the students were offered examples of themes that would not be appropriate for the story that was being discussed. Third, the teacher offered prompts that directed the students to a more general level.

Over three weeks, the teacher gradually phased out his role and became more of a facilitator, helping students with the more difficult concepts and themes. Two or three times a week, students wrote brief essays indicating what they saw as the major elements in the story. The teacher assisted students in seeing how the various story-grammar elements fit together, and in attending to the most germane details. The four-week intervention led to

significant improvements in the quality of essays written, responses to questions in the literature anthology, and responses to both higher- and lower-order comprehension questions generated by the teacher.

Reciprocal Teaching

Palincsar and Brown (1984) conducted several studies that focused on improving at-risk students' ability to comprehend science and social studies material. For each paragraph read, each group of students (under teacher supervision) performed the following four activities:

1. *Questioning*. The readers ask a main idea question about passage.
2. *Summarizing*. The readers integrate the information into a cogent statement that relays the gist of the passage.
3. *Clarifying*. The readers ask for an explanation of vocabulary or concepts that are unclear.
4. *Predicting*. The readers predict what they think the next paragraph might be about.

With the strategy in place, Palincsar and Brown needed to develop an effective training program that would assist students in successfully implementing these four activities. The limited success of earlier comprehension programs was attributed to an insufficient amount of active participation by students.

Palincsar and Brown taught their comprehension strategy via an interactive training program called *reciprocal teaching*. Each instructional episode took the form of a dialogue between teacher and students. During the initial session, after the passage was read silently, the adult teacher modeled the questioning, summarizing, clarifying, and predicting techniques. The students were urged to participate in any capacity, including "playing teacher." At first, students found it difficult to play teacher and lead the discussion. When this occurred, the teacher filled in. As the training progressed, the adult teachers, through the vehicle of the dialogue, assisted the students in sharpening and focusing the quality of their questions and summaries. This approach is an outgrowth of the "cognitive apprenticeship" model.

After ten days of instruction, the students were generating appropriate questions and summaries. The seventh-grade students who participated in this study averaged two to two and a half years below grade level and scored 50 percent or below on daily social studies assignments. The results indicated that students receiving reciprocal teaching were able to perform independently at an 80 percent level or higher on daily assignments. Further-

more, the effects were maintained over a two-month period. Also, transcripts of reciprocal teaching episodes provided qualitative verification of the improvement in students' dialogues.

The Framing Project

The framing technique (Armbruster, Anderson, and Meyer 1987) is based on a body of research which suggests that students' difficulty in comprehending expository text is due to their lack of understanding of text structures. Identifying text structures enables the learner to organize the critical information in a passage. Current research has demonstrated that "instructional graphics" (Armbruster, Anderson, and Ostertag 1987) can be successful in assisting students to determine and organize the important information that dictates a text structure. The macrostructure that develops enhances the oral and written comprehension of the text.

Framing is a variation on the "instructional graphics" theme. A *frame* is an instructional graphic that organizes the text structure/macrostructure of expository passages. Throughout the course of these investigations, two types of frames were used. The first type was similar to an incomplete outline. That is, major headings were given (with page numbers to help the students locate the information), but the subordinate items were omitted. The second type was made up of two parts: the incomplete outline (frame) and an information sheet. The information sheet consisted of squares containing facts with missing words or phases.

The first frame was used in a study that incorporated two experimental conditions. In Condition 1, the students read the text silently and independently completed their frame. After reading, the teacher and students discussed and revised the frame that was completed by the class before the passage was read. This frame contained their prior knowledge and predictions about the heading on the frame.

During Condition 2, the students took turns reading aloud. Then, a discussion about the frame was conducted by the teacher. Again, the frame completed prior to reading was revised. In both conditions, the teachers asked the students to substantiate their contributions with documentation from the text.

Three subsequent studies using the second type of frame (that is, the frame and the information sheet) were conducted. In these studies, which contained only one experimental condition, the students were placed into heterogeneous cooperative learning groups. Each group read the text, filled in the blanks on the information sheet, cut out the squares, and decided the appropriate placement of the squares on the frame. After all proposed frames

were finished, a class discussion was held where the students agreed on the correct placement of the information. Then, the students taped the squares in the correct order on their frame.

The results of these studies indicated that the framing strategy was significantly more effective for students of all ability levels than the activities suggested in the social studies teacher's guides. Framing helped the students generate a text structure/ macrostructure that is critical for the comprehension of expository text.

Relevance to Whole Language and Direct Instruction

These brief vignettes of story grammar, framing, and reciprocal teaching were chosen from over forty candidates of a rapidly emerging line of research. It is crucial to note that scaffolded instruction can be integrated into a whole-language approach as well as a direct instruction approach. In fact, it borrows from both orientations. Like whole language, the stress is on comprehension. A range of responses is always acceptable (provided the students can explain or justify their choice).

There is great room for teacher flexibility. These approaches can also be viewed as an expanded, more flexible vision of direct instruction and the effective teaching research (Duffy and others 1987). When these instructional strategies are properly implemented, the teacher models (or thinks aloud) in a clear fashion, providing adequate practice and relevant feedback. There is a consistent concern that all students participate at an appropriate level and that they experience success.

Conclusion

Both the effective-teaching research and the whole-language movement, can be distilled into images. Whole-language proponents imagine a classroom where students are genuinely interested in all they read or have read to them. Teachers are always experimenting, and their freedom is reflected in the dynamic class atmosphere. Diverse views are tolerated, rather than the right/wrong emphasis that most associate with school.

Direct instruction presents a very different type of image. Rather than the image of authentic, intuitive instruction, where teachers consistently model for students the excitement of reading and all aspects of language, it is an image of students learning in a highly interactive situation, one where they experience consistent success, where they are provided with immediate feedback when they experience problems. The role of the teacher is, in part, to demystify the process of reading, to show the students that there are rules and principles and that, by learning the system, all can read with comprehension.

One of the most prominent empirical researchers, Brophy (1985), concluded that one thing he learned from decades of classroom research is how deceptive labels can be. He noted that, when observing classrooms using approaches based on a complex Vygotskian model of scaffolded instruction, he still observed a good deal of direct instruction. Similarly, in direct-instruction classrooms, Brophy observed a lot of time devoted to comprehension and higher-order analytic skills, a good deal of reading of "real" unedited literature, and a good deal of scaffolded instruction. If nothing else, empirical research has enabled us to move beyond statements of philosophy and toward a serious analysis of what teachers really do with children.

Importance of Good Literature

Each of the traditions—whole language and direct instruction—has

definite contributions to make toward improving the quality of reading instruction for students with problems. The whole-language movement has reemphasized the importance of using good literature in classrooms and put extensive pressure on basal publishers to use the actual text written, rather than lifeless abridged, edited material that so often appears in basals. The movement has also stressed the importance of working on all facets of comprehension—including listening comprehension. It stresses more open-ended writing assignments, more personal writing, while savagely critiquing the plethora of "busy work" exercises on prefixes, suffixes, antonyms, contractions, and alphabetization. The movement urges that vocabulary instruction be actively linked to passage reading, rather than considered as yet one more segment of the lesson to be gotten through.

The movement has served to remind educators that the ultimate goal of reading instruction is to enable students to read with understanding. It has directed educators away from an overemphasis on easy-to-assess skills—such as prefixes, contractions, definitions of words in isolation. Finally, it has actively encouraged teachers to take charge of reading instruction and become less dependent on manuals and guides.

The Need for Systematic Instruction

The direct-instruction tradition serves as a necessary counterbalance. It provides many guidelines for how teachers can meet the needs of their students. It reminds us of the need for systematic instruction, with a great deal of practice and constant feedback. It reminds us that reading instruction for at-risk students requires a good deal of skill. The rate at which students learn is directly dependent on how clear our explanations and examples are, how careful our instructions are, how much practice we provide, the wording of the feedback provided to students.

This research always reminds us that we must approach learning situations from the students' perspective, not the adults'. Ideas and activities that are interesting to adults may well be baffling or boring (or both) for certain students in the class, especially those who don't read well or don't possess adequate background knowledge.

The tradition provides some clear indicators of effective instruction—whether at-risk students participate at a high level, how successful they are, whether the feedback and guidance they receive is comprehensible. The more recent cognitive-strategies research provides some fascinating new directions for systematic instruction in comprehension. It reinforces the ideal that effective instruction must be systematic to truly assist at-risk students—reliance on intuition won't work.

Most recent researchers on the change process (Elmore and McLaughlin 1988, Fullan 1982) stress that school reform and school improvement are slow and evolutionary. The heated battles and religious wars of earlier epochs typically end in some sort of a synthesis—one that reflects the realities of classrooms, rather than the polemics (Gersten and Woodward in press).

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